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<p>Tiivistelmä-Referat-Abstract</p> <p>THE NET IN THE HANDS OF CITIZENS A Study of the Internet and New Forms of Politics This dissertation is a collection of articles focusing on the Internet as a means of citizen empowerment and the networks as the new environment of civil society. The basic interest of the study is the potential of the Internet to enhance citizen resources and capabilities. The study is conceptual-theoretical by approach, the empirical case serving as a means of assessing the relevance of presuppositions. Two theoretical frameworks are applied to addressing the issue, namely the perspective of democracy and the discourse of modernization. The democracy framework offers the basic means of analyzing the network, that is, the concepts of civil society, the public sphere and citizenship. It also brings the historical perspective into the development of civil society. The focus is especially on the relationship between the Net and the citizen-based public sphere. The discourse of modernization provides a more general hypothesis on societal development. Central themes concern the cultural change in late-modern society and the role of the Internet in the transformation of the political and social spheres. When the significance of the cultural-aesthetic sphere increases and the significance of the institutionalized sphere of politics decreases, the Internet emerges as a new basis of citizen organization. Because the Net is simultaneously a consequence of other development trends and an agent of transformation, its relation to cultural change is complex. The empirical example is an endeavour to influence local city planning, in which the researcher becomes an actor. In the general analysis the principal actor is a citizen, whereas in the empirical example the actor is a resident. Alongside the Net, the forms of local democracy and the positioning of the citizen in the political system are discussed. It is supposed that when the structure and content of politics changes, the role of local democracy becomes more salient and that in principle new space is opened up for it. In the empirical part the framework is based on more action theory.</p> <p>The conclusions of the study concern the Net as a macro structure and its implications for the public sphere and new forms of politics. The position of the Internet is poorly understood if the whole range of networks is not taken into consideration. The question is about a huge technological system that consists both of separate, hierarchically constituted subsystems and of interlinked equal partners. Consequently, the Net has simultaneous but contradictory effects and ways of operation. From today's angle the Net is rather an instrument than an autonomic actor but in the long term it will radically change the ways of perception and expression. Ecologically it may have harmful influences because it will speed up the most various kinds of human activity. From the point of view of the economy and administration it is a new guiding and controlling medium that can be also be turned against civil society. On the other hand, it is important as a public sphere, as an originator of new fora of discussion and as a creator of new conceptual spaces. It will markedly enhance freedom of expression and lead to new kinds of connections between people. From the citizen perspective it will serve as an instrument for gathering information and enabling social interaction. In this sense, the most important function of the Internet is nowadays not in the sphere of politics but in social bonds. The Net is part of cultural change where the cultural, communicative and media aspects of society get more prominence, so that its significance appears in these spheres.</p>		
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